

Inviting Families to the Table **(Or inviting people to a party!)**

Agencies must plan for family involvement like they would plan for a party. Below is a list of details to consider:

- Decide that the agency wants to have parent involvement and plan for the event.
- Develop the preliminary vision of family involvement.
- Choose the guest that will be invited to the event.
- Invite the participants early.
- Let the guest know what kind of event they are invited to attend.
- Tell the guest the time the event begins and ends.
- Ask if they can come at this time, if not can the time be changed?
- Does the guest need to bring anything?
- Is the place accessible and comfortable for the guest?
- Is there a dress code?
- Is there a theme to the event?
- Is everything furnished or will the guest be expected to pay for something.
- Can they bring another guest?
- Is child care provided for the guest?
- Who else is coming?
- Why do you want this guest to attend the event?
- Does the guest need help getting to the event?
- Gather the necessary supplies that are needed to make sure the event goes smoothly.
- Double check all the logistics and review possible problems.
- Provide a welcoming environment for your guest.
- Greet your guest and introduce them to others at the event.
- Treat your guest with respect and make sure others at the event do the same.
- Listen to your guest as they speak and help them feel heard.
- Provide assistance and support to your guest through out the event as needed.
- At the close of the event thank people for coming and wish them well.
- Give the guest party favors (stipends) that lets them know that you appreciate them coming.
- Thank people for contributing to the success of the event.
- Follow up with a thank-you note or a phone call thanking your guest.

During the planned events relationships can be developed, people's strengths and interest can be identified and developed, and trust can be grown. Trust is essential in the development of relationship and true partnerships. Families need to feel like their suggestions are heard and not dismissed. Often the family members hold vital information that can be built upon and enhanced to build a more realistic System of Care. Communication and communication styles play a major role in helping people feel accepted by a group. Knowing the different ways people communicate can help stave of problems and miscommunications. Remember when including families and caregivers that they are not always privileged to all the information that providers have, but they are the experts on their children, families and communities. Validate concerns, ideas, and the fact that they were able to attend the event as it is often a major accomplishment on the family member's part to get to any outside event with all the crisis that exists in their lives.